

ENGLISH B

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Marks this session covered the full range from excellent to elementary with a good number of essays demonstrating a good working knowledge of the investigative process. Nonetheless, examiners noted that candidates continue to submit a number of inappropriate topics or topics with a poor approach that severely limits the awarding of high levels in a number of criteria. It is important in the early stages of the essay process to use all of the resources available for guidance especially the appropriate pages of the *Extended Essay Guide*.

The majority of essays submitted were appropriate for Language B. However, less successful essays took the form of a descriptive report rather than an organized investigation allowing for the development of a persuasive argument. Too many essays were not well suited to any of the three prescribed categories, which indicated a need for greater familiarity with the basic requirements as laid out in the Guide. Essays that were clearly framed within a category often exhibited a more successful focused approach to the research question. Generally successful topics showed a high degree of organizational awareness, regardless of the area of study.

Category 3 literary topics appeared noticeably more often than Category 1 and 2 topics. There were many strong essays that explored a wide variety of novels and plays appropriately. Many of the most successful of these essays compared characters or themes in two works of a similar nature or focused on the development of one or more characters within one work. Weaker essays dealt superficially with plot with not much in the way of focused argument. Comparing a novel with its film version nearly always proved unsuccessful.

Among the most popular, though sometimes problematic choices came in Category 2b, essays of a general cultural nature. The requirement here is that the RQ be narrowed through the use of cultural artifacts. Candidates should avoid an unfocused historical recounting of social movements or eras in favour of some artifact, be it a document, law, symbol, object or even iconic event or figure that is in some way specifically representative of the movement and that illustrates a particular attitude or value within the society.

Another problem area included media topics that were far too broad and very often not related specifically to the target culture. For example, an analysis of a series of

advertisements for beauty products would tend to say more about advertising technique than about anything important about the culture or society.

There were only a few Category 2a topics dealing with the cultural impact of language. Most often, this focus was combined with a category 2b topic. Again, media topics such as “How do adverts use language to persuade consumers?” tended to be broadly connected to media in general with little or any focus on the target language or culture. More successful topics tended to be targeted on specific language impact such as misogynist language in popular rappers’ lyrics (the artifact) that have an impact on young people’s attitudes toward women in the US.

There were few strictly Category 1 essays submitted. There are many possibilities in the Category 1 that could serve many candidates well given the natural focus of general linguistic analysis and semantics for language B students. However, too many essays attempt to discuss “the influence of English” on their mother-tongue culture or for example on a broad study of how pidgin languages are formed. This type of essay is broad and usually flawed because the focus is on another language or some broad linguistic concept rather than a focused investigation of English language use. One good example reviewed specific language used in a selection of Obama’s first presidential campaign speeches alluding consistently to the traditional concept of the American Dream.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

Many candidates included the RQ appropriately in the introduction, though there are still a fair number failing to do so. It is important that candidates refrain from overly broad RQ’s and that topics clearly fit one of the category descriptions (there is an explanation of these in the Group 2 chapter of the *Extended essay guide*). Candidates should explicitly identify which category the RQ is related to on the cover sheet. Research questions that merely elicit a yes/no response or simply present an unsubstantiated opinion tend not to be successful. Candidates and supervisors need to take care that the chosen topics are appropriate for this subject.

Criterion B: introduction

Many candidates successfully integrated the research question, pertinent background for the question, and a sense of the worth/significance of the topic under investigation. In some cases, however, the introduction merely mirrored the abstract or explained the candidate’s personal connection to the subject rather than presenting the academic context of the investigation and why and how the topic is significant to this subject.

Criterion C: investigation

In most cases it was evident that the candidate carried out a proper research project. The best essays made good use of secondary sources to support their arguments. In literary topics, the primary text remains central, but good essays showed awareness of modern thinking on the subject while the best challenged such thinking. Too many essays relied almost entirely on web sources, which is not unacceptable in itself, but most provided little

evidence of “deep searches’ of varied online data bases and university library systems. Candidates and supervisors are reminded to evaluate the reliability of all sources especially those from the web and to endeavour to use a variety of sources. The lack of resources should not be used to justify shortcomings in the EE. If there seem to be insufficient sources, supervisors are advised to steer candidates to other related topics with more possibilities.

Criterion D: Knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Most candidates seemed to have a fair grasp of the basic knowledge of the subject, but at times, the limited range of sources hindered the award of full marks. Candidates often quoted relevant information but did not always develop their own thoughts sufficiently to show a thorough understanding of the material. One examiner wrote that ‘students presented a good knowledge of the topic but failed to show a good understanding’. Some essays contained large numbers of unattributed assertions that actually undermine the impression of knowledge.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Having a worthy argument is the key to a successful extended essay. Poorly phrased research questions rarely help in achieving the top levels in this criterion. Inclusion of interesting but largely irrelevant information also lowered achievement. The best essays had a clear sense of purpose in logically revealing the thesis. In the case of literature, merely summarizing or narrating the plot does not constitute an argument, whereas a clear thesis, with textual evidence to support the candidate’s contentions proved very successful. Examiners noted a tendency in a number of essays to divide and subdivide them using discrete sections to the point of interrupting the flow of reading. The corollary was that the very short sections tended to be shallow and led to a poorly developed, disjointed argument.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

The highest levels were awarded to essays that smoothly integrated evidence from primary texts and (where appropriate) from secondary texts with insightful explanation. Many candidates still have difficulty distinguishing between analysis and description. Merely paraphrasing or summarizing sources does not suffice. At times, very interesting arguments lacked relevant supporting evidence and thus were not rewarded under this criterion. Literature based essays must use textual evidence to develop the argument.

Criterion G: use of language

The general level of language use in the majority of essays was appropriate and impressive. Candidates failed to take advantage of what should be high levels in this criterion by not proofreading their work more carefully. With the various word processing techniques, there is no excuse for submitting an essay with careless spelling or punctuation errors. Improvements could also be made in using proper terminology for a given subject. Knowledge of appropriate literary terms, for example, would be rewarded. Cultural topics, for example in the media or fine arts, also use specific vocabulary common to the subject. Candidates should try to remain clear and genuine rather than try to impress with overly embellished prose, though an appropriate academic register is expected.

Criterion H: conclusion

This is an area of general weakness noted by many examiners. Though many of the conclusions were at least consistent with the information presented, too many essays merely restated the main points without synthesis or thoughtful consideration. Candidates should be reminded that the conclusion is not the place to present new ideas or opinions not already considered earlier in the essay. Along with a restatement of the thesis, candidates should look for 'a synthesis in light of the discussion' to bring closure to the argument.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Overall, the general presentation of essays continues to improve often containing excellent Works Cited pages and headings and sub-headings within the essay that enhance organization, especially when proper transitional elements were included. However, as mentioned under criterion E, overuse of subheadings may lead to a less effective flow in the argument. Word count should appear on the title page. The criterion explicitly states that an essay that exceeds 4000 words is awarded zero points.

The Table of Contents is best set out as an outline of the major sections. In addition, the contents of any appendix should be listed. However, it is not helpful to add extraneous material to the appendix "just in case".

The Works Cited/ Bibliography page and reference formats must be consistent. Properly documenting information coming from websites seems to be a particular problem. Candidates should only include materials that have been cited in the essay on the Works Cited page. With all the sources currently available from libraries and the web, there is really no need for poor citation or bibliographic form.

Criterion J: abstract

While many essays presented clear abstracts, this requirement is still not well understood. Examiners noted that a number of abstracts often included purely introductory material. The best abstracts succinctly summarize the essay using three relevant areas; the research question, the approach to the question or how the question was dealt with, and the conclusions reached. These should be presented in a straightforward manner and written last as it is a summary of the essay. The abstract should be placed directly after the title page.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Many essays received fairly high marks in this criterion especially those where supervisors added relevant comments about candidate enthusiasm, positive engagement in the process and insights from the viva voce. Too many supervisors continue to leave the supervisor's comment section of the coversheet blank or make inappropriate comments of a personal nature. This makes the application of criterion K far more difficult for examiners and often leaves a poor impression. Supervisors should refrain from evaluating the essay itself.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors and candidates are strongly advised to carefully review pertinent sections of the *Extended Essay Guide* together as early as possible in the process and to consult the OCC for supporting documents such as the most recent subject reports.

Candidates and supervisors should check that the RQ developed focuses on a question that can be supported by an effective argument (see Further Comments). Research questions that are merely a matter of personal opinion should be avoided.

Candidates should follow the instructions in the Guide for an abstract, introduction and conclusion precisely in order to gain maximum marks with little effort.

Consultation with librarians on preferred styles and sites for generating bibliographies/works cited pages and footnotes or in text references is to be encouraged. As an academic source, Wikipedia is often suspect and should be used judiciously if at all. Though the IB does not specify any one format, schools should consider adopting a suitable standard format, such as MLA or APA, for all Group 2 essays.

Further comments

The candidate's development of a working research question with a solid approach is perhaps the most important area where guidance from the supervisor is concerned. Supervisors should intervene early on especially if a candidate seems to be developing a potentially poor essay. Although a lack of academic resources may be a serious drawback, candidates and supervisors need to be reminded that on its own this is not an adequate excuse for submitting mediocre work. It would be better to alter the RQ.

The EE is an independent investigation, but this does not mean the process is not without some pointed guidance. Candidates must be made aware of the possible global or non-culture-specific nature of certain topics (e.g. advertising, climate change, abuse of drugs or alcohol), where much of the material could be applicable to any culture. The consideration of an appropriate artifact will focus the essay properly and lead to a more satisfying investigation in many of these cases. As concerns literary essays, *all* texts must have originally been written in English.